

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Andrea Barton Reeves, and I am President and CEO at HARC. For the past 62 years, we have supported people with intellectual and related disabilities and their families live with dignity and inclusion. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 451, AN ACT CONCERNING GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION, STATE CONTRACTING, REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS AND THE STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION, proposing to expand the Qualified Partnership element of the Preferred Purchasing Program for persons with disabilities.

As you may know, for people with intellectual and other disabilities, finding opportunities for competitive or supported employment is a challenging task. It is so difficult for people with disabilities to overcome misperceptions and stereotypes about their capabilities and their ability to contribute productively to a work environment. This is especially true in a recovering economy, where competition for any open job is fierce and employers are reticent to take a chance on anyone they may have uncertainty about. Last year, you passed SB 761 (PA 13-227), which made permanent a successful pilot program that creates work opportunities for persons with disabilities and economic disadvantages, specifically in janitorial contract work. This sent a message to every employer that the State of Connecticut is committed to employment opportunities for every citizen, and that it believes that the benefits of providing work opportunities for people with disabilities.

This year, I would ask that you take this good work one step further, with the passage of SB 451. This bill expands the Qualified Partnership to create jobs in additional contracted

service areas, such as mail room staffing, data entry services, and telephone call center staffing. The expansion of the program will provide more opportunities for employment and community integration for individuals with disabilities. This will support not only each individual, but the state's vision for our community as a whole, by creating jobs that enhance independence and develop tax-paying citizens where they might not otherwise exist.

HARC has believed in and committed extensive resources to employment for individuals with disabilities in the community for over twenty years. We have proudly participated in the Preferred Purchasing Program for over a decade. Our participation in the program, coupled with our own collaborations with over 30 businesses throughout greater Hartford, has allowed us to see firsthand the mutual benefit that comes from creating and providing meaningful work opportunities for people with disabilities. We have 125 participants working in insurance companies, hospitals, retail facilities and even here, in the Legislative Office Building.

SB 451 will build on the work that this legislature has already done to support work opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Work means more independence, greater contribution to society, enhanced self-esteem and meaning and purpose to one's life. Supporting SB 451, expanding an already successful program, not only provides opportunities for work for people with disabilities, but demonstrates this State's continued commitment to job creation and to providing opportunities for meaningful, dignified work for every citizen in the state, without regard to disability. I urge you to pass SB 451, demonstrating the State's commitment to employment for persons with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrea Barton Reeves